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Education in the past centuries

- 1 The development of education in Indonesia has been influenced by religious or traditional principles, the interests of the ruling powers, and the spirit of sovereignty as a nation (Tilaar, 1995; Djojonegoro, 1996; Mestoko *et al.*, 1985). In ancient times, education in the archipelago was delivered through apprenticeship within family and community settings. In the Dutch colonial era (1600s–1942), education was aimed only at a particular group of people via school classification based on descent and social status. The selective stratification was intended to generate elite classes and obedient educated human resources. This reality raised awareness of nationalism. Since 1912, there have been various movements underlying the independent creation of a national education system. During the Japanese invasion (1942–5), such discrimination was eliminated and Bahasa Indonesia started to be used as the medium of instruction. However, school was utilized as a training facility for militarymen and workers during World War II.
- 2 On August 17, 1945, Indonesia proclaimed its independence. Universal education was conducted to develop the sense of nationality around the supreme value of Pancasila, the five basic values of a sovereign state: a belief in the One and Only God; just and civilized humanity; the unity of Indonesia; democratic life led by wisdom of thoughts in deliberation amongst representatives of the people; and social justice for all people of Indonesia.
- 3 This rapid development encouraged the government to build educational infrastructure all over the country, along with a private-sector contribution to establish educational institutions. Up to the early 1960s, however, the orientation toward nation- and character-building, and equal access to education, in the great straits due to 1) liberal democracy, the influence of communism and “guided democracy” entailing political

instability, and 2) Dutch military aggression. In 1965, the “Old Order” regime decreed that the goal of education was to generate socialist citizens.

- 4 The “New Order”(1966–1998) purified such “deviant ideas” to generate “Pancasila-ist people for development”. Therefore, universal-education initiatives –six-year basic education (1984) and nine-year basic education (1994) –rapidly developed. Since the 1970s, the government has built tens of thousands of elementary schools in almost all villages. Considering education as human-capital investment, since the 1990s the government has constantly improved access to, and the quality and role of, education in promoting economic development.

Interregnum

- 5 The monetary crisis at the end of 1990s triggered public awareness about reforming the centralistic regime as part of demands for a democratic and just society. In this “Reform Order”, there were two new regulations relevant to the future of the national education system: regional autonomy, and a minimum of 20 percent of state budgets earmarked for education.
- 6 Since 2001, central government has decentralized management of education to district level by promoting school autonomy intended to enhance the distribution of quality education. This idea is based on a World Bank report (1998) that identifies factors obstructing education reform. In addition, other international actors, such as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), USAID, AUSAID, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, expressed their support for reforming schools and teachers. In the meantime, the challenge of Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets gave a boost to universal education. On the other hand, the result of international student assessments, such as PISA and TIMSS, have reflected the poor performance of the education system. Therefore, the Law of National Education System (No. 20/2003) provided the platform for national standardization of the education system and covers school management, the curriculum, education financial support, and teacher professionalism.
- 7 To support the achievement of universal education, the government launched a School Operational Aid fund based on the calculation of each student’s unit cost. Moreover, the law assisted some schools in complying with the national standard to become “International Standard Schools”. This initiative seemed ambitious in terms of teacher qualifications, English as the language of instruction, curriculum enrichment (adopting that of OECD countries), and more facilities. Nevertheless, it generated controversy, and the alliance of parents and education activists resulted in judicial review. They believed that their constitutional rights were being violated due to discrimination and the privatization of public schools.

Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment

- 8 The goal of education in developing the character of the nation has been infiltrated by authorities’ interests in portraying their imagined society. In its reforms, the government has made serious efforts to modernize the centralized curriculum through systematic study of program structure and core subjects based on “active learning” and a “process

approach” (1975–1994). This attempt has been accompanied by the implementation of a final examination aimed at determining student’s graduation and selecting their path for further education. However, school actually had a degree of authority in determining students’ graduation.

- 9 The focus on universal education and a centralized curriculum has resulted in superficial uniformity and undermined individual uniqueness. Leigh vividly illustrated such pedagogical practice:

Every question in every subject has a correct answer within each sector of schooling through nationally legitimated curricula. Teachers and pupils know that schools are places where one “learns by heart” the requisite texts, whether they are in Mathematics, Bahasa Indonesia, Morals of Pancasila, or History. Whether students perceive the process as a game or reality, one result is the numbing (or perhaps multi-layering) of creative young minds – at least during the time that the children are in school. (1999, cited in Jalal and Musthafa, 2001: 10)

- 10 In the era of decentralization, the government created Curriculum 2004, which was then handed over to an independent institution, the National Agency of Education Standard, to formulate core-subject competencies and develop the School-Based Curriculum in 2006. This was an era in which teachers had the authority to develop the curriculum based on the idea of “experiential and contextual learning”. Within the implementation, there was criticism on the administrative approach to school curriculum quality assurance. Many teachers were overwhelmed in developing syllabi, which hinders them in improving their instructional practices. This motivated the government to implement Curriculum 2013, which puts emphasis on the mastery of core competencies by putting forward a “project-based and scientific approach”. The government provides syllabi, student textbooks, and teacher handbooks. However, the initiative has been criticized by independent teacher associations because of hasty preparation and centralized and uniform approaches that may diminish teachers’ authority. Today, that curriculum is being implemented in a small number of schools.
- 11 Besides rapid curriculum change, there is a controversy about high-stakes testing in this era. The government carries out national examinations as an attempt to map the quality of education by setting minimum standards to pass one subject. In practice, it has the biggest role in determining students’ graduation. This is the point criticized by the alliance of parents, teachers, and students. In addition, many parts of the media recount systematic cheating happening in almost all schools.

Teacher professionalism

- 12 The inspirational role played by teachers as they built the foundations of the national education system made people regard their profession as a highly respected and desirable occupation: teachers were perceived as nation-builders and community leaders. However, rushed programs for universal-education initiatives rapidly hired hundreds of thousands of unprepared teachers. As most teachers are civil servants and they are syndicated in the one and only union acknowledged by the government, they were required to deliver the national curriculum. With the growth of economy, other professions started to sideline teachers’ earlier privileged status in the society. There are currently almost 4 million teachers ranging from kindergarten to secondary education; in public, private, and

Islamic schools; and with both civil service and temporary, school-based contract status (Chang *et al.*, 2014). The difference in status results in a difference in income.

- 13 The Law of Teacher and Lecturer (No. 14/2005) constitutes a comprehensive reform of teacher management and development: pre-and-in-service education; induction; certification; performance appraisal; and career development. Teaching is officially acknowledged as a profession that has core competencies, career prospects, the right to associate, and welfare assurance (Jalal *et al.*, 2009). A certified civil-servant teacher will receive a functional allowance distinguishing them from other civil servants. This doubling of payment has regenerated the status of teachers and attracted the interest of young people in becoming teachers. However, Chang *et al.* (2014) report that there is no difference in the quality of teaching and learning conducted by certified and uncertified teachers. On the other hand, some teachers have reported bureaucratization of the certification system and allowance payments. Buchori (2007) sees the situation as a sign of the basic problems and challenges relating to teaching reform in Indonesia.

Education in the “post” era

- 14 At the end of 2013, we were confused about the most recent PISA results. How can an Indonesian student with low performance in mathematics, science, and reading feel extremely happy at school? What is the theory of change behind such a paradox? What lessons can be learned and what are possible future directions?
- 15 Not all reforms are successful, especially in terms of outcomes and effects on students. The purpose was brave and bold, and the problem clear, but the proposed solution was not the same as expected. It was possible that previous regimes used the “distraction” of autocracy (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009) to hold on to their power. Similarly, current reforms may be blinded by “wrong drivers” or infected by “GERM”, the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011) that entails standardization, increased focus on core subjects, prescribed curricula, and borrows market-oriented reform ideas, and high-stakes accountability and control. These may hinder instructional practices that develop higher-order thinking skills and embody virtues and values (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009).
- 16 Due to its complexity, it is not easy to clearly define what the model of educational change is in Indonesia. However, the emergence of contradictions may raise awareness and increase resilience to take mindful actions. It is possible to assert that Indonesia is experiencing postcolonialism, post-centralization, and post-standardization phenomena. During the hard times of the colonial era, in 1922, Ki Hajar Dewantara established the first national education system as a means of enculturation in the independent Indonesian nation. His inspiring work awakened the nation. Near the turn of the millennium, widespread demonstrations demanded the elimination of the authoritarian regime. It is also possible that this encouraged the decentralization of education. Similar conditions occurred as school autonomy was infected by GERM and the alliance of teachers and parents brought marketization and standardization practices to court. Finally, current teacher reform should be carefully evaluated as to whether it has reprofessionalized or deprofessionalized the teaching profession.
- 17 These “post” phenomena imply that educational reform cannot be entrusted to the government alone. Grassroots movements may result in positive alterations that

sometimes can operate independently from or even in opposition to the ruling power (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009). Examples include innovating school districts underpinned by the vision of a learning community (Suratno, 2014) and school-university partnerships and public engagement encouraging links between schooling and society. It is not an easy task. Such attempts, however, highlight that we need other methods of inspiration, responsibility and sustainability (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009), and of collaboration and dialogue, in reforming our national education system.

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ABSTRACTS

Indonesia's national education system developed from the struggle for independence and the renaissance of the nation. During its development, many influences, local or global, contributed to the changing nature of the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and teacher professionalism. The author argues that education reform should entail a dialog involving the government, educators, and society to attain the goal of constructing an independent society of democracy and social justice.

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Keywords: curriculum, cultural tradition, educational system, pedagogy, educational models, evaluation, teachers

Mots-clés: curriculum, tradition culturelle, évaluation, enseignant, système éducatif, modèle éducatif, pédagogie

Palabras claves: curriculum, tradición cultural, evaluación, docente, sistema educativo, modelo educacional, pedagogía

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